



249452

[About](#) [Contact](#) [Help](#) [Advertise](#)

THE TIMES
times.com

Online Coupons Local savings! [View all >>](#)
 ▶ Community Pet Hospital: Rabies shot for \$20
 ▶ Pet Supplies "Plus": Free pig ear!



[lake news](#) [porter news](#) [illiana news](#) [sports](#) [business](#) [entertainment](#) [community](#) [opinion](#) [obituaries](#) [archives](#) [market](#)

[EXTRA!]

E-mail this
to a friendView a print
version ofSearch this
online articleDiscuss
in our forum

Turning brown to green

Push on to return Calumet Container property to environmentally-friendly site

BY STEVE ZABROSKI
Times Correspondent

This story ran on nwitimes.com on Sunday, January 29, 2006 12:05 AM CST

HAMMOND | The fences to keep people out are coming down, and residents are now invited inside to help restore what was once some of the most severely polluted land in the region.

ADVERTISEMENT



Returning the formerly toxic Calumet Container site on the city's north side to a natural state suitable for enjoyment by humans and wildlife has taken the better part of 23 years, and coordinators of the cleanup want help from the community for the project's final phase.

"This is a consensus-driven reuse plan," said Thomas Bloom, redevelopment coordinator with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund division.

The EPA has spent \$2.2 million since last year removing more than 30,000 tons of soil laced with carcinogenic and toxic substances from the 11-acre site just south of Wolf Lake on 136th Street at the Illinois border.

For the next few weeks, as many as 100 trucks a day are bringing clean sand, gravel and dirt to fill in the excavations, some of which extend six feet beneath the surface.

This spring, native grasses, shrubs and trees will be reintroduced at the site to complement a citywide bike trail and habitat for birds and animals -- a restoration plan hammered out through years of discussion by groups on both sides of the state line.

Neighbors of the site, from the nearby Pulaski Park Neighborhood Association to the bi-state Association for the Wolf Lake Initiative, the Boy Scouts of America to Purdue University Calumet biology students, will all have a hand in nurturing the property when reseeded efforts get under way in April -- and beyond.

"This is a milestone for the area," said Daniel Goldfarb, local program director with the national Wildlife Habitat Council, a Maryland-based nonprofit which works with EPA on restoring industrial areas to ecological balance.

"The project is an important precedent to demonstrate the reuse of a formerly contaminated site," Goldfarb said, "And to investigate biological technologies for sustainable natural cleanup."

Because the property is bisected with petroleum and natural gas pipelines, some soil contaminated with heavy metals such as lead and cadmium remains around the pipes at one

YOU CAN HELP
assist in the
restoration of
former Calumet
Container site
Thomas Bloom
Redevelopment
coordinator,
division U.S.
Environment
Protection Agency
(312) 886-1900
bloom.thoma

end of the property and can't safely be removed.

To address the problem, Goldfarb is reviewing a list of native plants which uptake toxic materials through their roots, removing them from the soil through a newly discovered process called phytoremediation.

"The project will help us understand natural remediation technologies," Goldfarb said. "It's something we can use on other brownfield sites."

Once the native upland prairie and low-lying wetland plants are reintroduced, attention from the community to post-cleanup care is most important, Bloom said.

"The system will be delicate at first, and neighbors will need to be diligent in preventing invasive non-native species like phragmites and purple loosestrife from taking over again," he said.

Though most of the Calumet Container site belongs to Lake County Commissioners due to non-payment of property taxes, the city of Hammond owns much of the land north and south.

"We're looking to connect those areas as part of a green mosaic from Lake Michigan through North Hammond," said Ronald Novak, executive director of the city's Department of Environmental Management.

Novak, who's monitored conditions at the site since 1974 – when Calumet Container recycled drums and barrels for the chemical, oil, and steel industries and dumped hundreds of thousands of gallons of polychlorinated biphenyls, lead, cadmium, chromium, benzene, toluene, xylene and others into the ground before closing after a 1982 fire – said he's happy the cleanup is moving along.

"From Lake Michigan to Wolf Lake and George Lake, the north end of the city is being looked at more as a recreational area than an industrial one," he said. "This is a good direction for enhancing the quality of life not only for nearby residents, but for the entire city."

And none of this could have happened, Novak said, if Hammond hadn't come up with the state matching funds for EPA's initial cleanup work in 1984, when more than 10,000 gallons of hazardous waste and 1,345 tons of crushed chemical drums and contaminated soil was removed from the site.

<< Previous Story: 'Gifted' hopefuls bare musical souls || Next Story: Steel City turns 100 this year >>



[Back to top](#) | [Return to homepage](#) | [More stories from Top News](#)



The page cannot be displayed

The page you are looking for is currently unavailable. The Web site might be experiencing technical difficulties, or you may need to adjust your browser settings.

ADVERTISEMENTS